

Theory of practice, rational choice, and historical change

Ivan Ermakoff

Published online: 7 August 2010
© Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2010

Abstract If we are to believe the proponents of the Theory of Practice and of Rational Choice, the gap between these two paradigmatic approaches cannot be bridged. They rely on ontological premises, theories of motivations and causal models that stand too far apart. In this article, I argue that this theoretical antinomy loses much of its edge when we take as objects of sociological investigation processes of historical change, that is, when we try to specify in theoretical terms how and in which conditions historical actors enact and endorse shifts in patterns of relations as well as shifts in the symbolic and cognitive categories that make these relations significant. I substantiate this argument in light of the distinction between two temporalities of historical change: first, the long waves of gradual change and, second, the short waves of moments of breaks and ruptures. Along the way, I develop an argument about the conditions of emergence of self-limiting norms and the centrality of epistemic beliefs in situations of high disruption.

Keywords Crisis · Endogamy · Matrimonial strategies · Norms · Revolution

“Reason is historical through and through” (Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*: 138)

Intellectual and academic lives are punctuated with controversies of all kinds, more or less intense, acrimonious, and protracted. Some, cast in the terms of paradigmatic stances, pit ontological assumptions, regulative claims, and methodological directives against one another. Often such debates have the tone of an abrasive intellectual jostling—what Latin orators called *controversia* laying bare antagonisms that seem all the more irreducible as they get blended with political considerations (Desbordes 1995: 40; Fabiani 1997: 27). Less frequently, they take on the more amicable guise of the *disputatio*. Here the discussion does not imply some form of litigation but the prospect of a resolution of differences. How much do we

I. Ermakoff (✉)
Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin–Madison, Madison, USA
e-mail: ermakoff@ssc.wisc.edu

learn from these controversies? Can we reasonably argue that paradigmatic confrontations help us refine claims, hypotheses, and research agendas?

Consider the standoff between Rational Choice and the Theory of Practice. Both are “often cited” as alternatives (Adams et al. 2005: 38). They designate theoretical approaches endowed with a set of key concepts and core claims. The key concepts of Rational Choice are interest and optimization. Actors seek to optimize their interests (Coleman 1990: 14–15) assuming that their beliefs and intentions are consistent (Elster 1986: 12–13; Tsebelis 1990: 18, 24–27). The key concepts of the Theory of Practice are the habitus and the field. The habitus is a system of enduring dispositions, cognitively informed by a system of classification, that constitutes a generative principle of practices (Bourdieu 1984: 110). A field is the system of objective relations—between positions differentiated in terms of various forms of capital—that at once gives shape and validates this system of dispositions (Bourdieu 1996b: 83). Actors have a practical knowledge of their field of practice. This is Bourdieu’s key insight about social interactions.

The proponents of the Theory of Practice have had harsh words to say about Rational Choice (Wacquant and Calhoun 1989; Bourdieu 1990). The fundamental mistake of Rational Choice is to reify a model of rationality, the validity of which is peculiar to specific conditions of practice (Bourdieu 1990: 63–64). Rationality is always situated. It is relative to the constraints and the rules of the game inherent to the field of practice being considered. In making optimization the universal yardstick of rational choice, Rational Choice pundits are oblivious to the relative character of the rationality they claim to operationalize.

Similarly, Rational Choice pundits are oblivious to the unequal distribution of resources and constraints. Actors can manipulate neither the objective relations in which they are embedded nor the types and the amounts of capital available to them. In portraying individual actors as autonomous monads who, ultimately, are responsible for their own choice, Rational Choice theorists obfuscate the fact that resources and constraints have a resilient character that both highlights and sanctions differentials in social capacities (Bourdieu 1990: 50). The world inhabited by the fictions of Rational Choice has no structure. Actors face external constraints. But these are not systematically related to their social characteristics. This lack of attention to variation goes hand in hand with the lack of attention to the patterned character of rationality in the context of specific fields.

Buttressing this theoretical critique is an epistemological critique of the social interests vested in the Rational Choice postulates. Here the focus is on the social conditions of intellectual production. Basically, the critique states that social theorists who expound a Rational Choice conception of rationality produce a model of their own practice (Wacquant and Calhoun 1989: 53; Bourdieu 1990: 49). They are the ones who ponder, assess, and fully endorse the prospect of maximizing their own interests. Maximization is the evaluative standard of people who do business. By derivation, it has become the standard evaluative criterion of academics who either conceive themselves as businessmen or assume an elective affinity with the world of business. Being enmeshed in the intellectual dispositions characteristic of their status, these social scientists remain prisoner of their own social conditioning. This fact alone suffices to invalidate their theoretical stance. In their case, intellectual production is inherently laden with the cognitive biases inherent to a social position.

Faced with this indictment, Rational Choice practitioners could reply that whatever the faults and the limitations of their framework, it has two key merits that are crucially lacking in the Theory of Practice. First, Rational Choice concepts are precise enough to lend themselves to an empirical protocol (Kiser and Hechter 1998: 807-10). The concepts of habitus and fields, by contrast, elude systematic attempts to operationalize them (Boudon 1989: 156-57). Second, and correlatively, the radical character of the Rational Choice hypotheses make these hypotheses particularly suited to the prospect of empirical refutation. There is little room in the kingdom of the habitus for the prospect of refuted claims (Elster 1983: 110-111). Deviations from expected patterns either confirm the prevalence of structural relations—they are the exception confirming the rule—or reflect shifting structural conditions.

I argue that this confrontation holds as long as we cast it in the general terms of a controversy between unconditional claims. When the focus is on specific objects constructed as research problems, the controversy loses its edge and points of divergence appear much less stringent and decisive than they may seem on paper. Rational Choice analysts do not ignore the issue of constraints: optimization as a decisional problem designates a type of choice under constraints. Nor does Rational Choice a priori exclude a genetic analysis of constraint emergence. Conversely, the open character of the main concepts honed by the Theory of Practice prove to be of considerable heuristic value when the task is to identify behavioral patterns that pose challenges to an instrumental and external view of rationality.

In this article, I develop this claim by considering analyses of historical changes and more specifically, analyses that construe the *process* of change as a research problem in light of cases that have the peculiarity of being clearly situated in time and space. This type of objects simultaneously construed as sites for empirical investigation and theoretical problems allows us to challenge what Bourdieu would call a “scholastic” approach to theoretical debates, that is, a taxonomic discussion of distinctions, the main property of which is to be self-referential. Investigating historical change as process makes it difficult to stick to a principled theoretical stance for two reasons.

First, the focus is on groups and actors who deploy lines of conduct in specific conjunctures. Adopting the viewpoint of grand theory is untenable in these conditions. The case is no longer a research problem if those involved in the process under scrutiny get abstracted on behalf of a conceptual apparatus. The specific character of the case—it is historically situated—forces theory to step down from its pedestal. Second, historical change explored with a close attention to contextual parameters poses a challenge to the prospect of setting forth theoretical claims that have relevance beyond the case under scrutiny. History is full of noise. Any close-up magnifies the possible role of accidents, incidents, and contingent moves that turn out to have wide consequences. What is then the adequate analytical strategy to identify patterns and regularities?

I discuss both points by examining how the Theory of Practice and Rational Choice address the issue of historical change in two temporal settings: the long run of transitional processes and the short run of moments of crisis. Regarding the long run, we cannot understand transition processes without exploring how actors collectively reconfigure the logic of their practice. This requires analyzing the conjunction of strategies departing from the status quo and the conditions under

which these deviations give way to a new set of dispositions. The conceptual tools provided by Rational Choice allow us to tackle different moments of this process. These tools highlight incentives to step out from dispositional structures and they highlight the strategic processes contributing to the emergence of normative dispositions. Conversely, the analytical injunctions specific to the Theory of Practice draw attention to the relational patterns from which these strategies emerge, and to the categories of perception making these strategies significant from actors' own viewpoint. Rational Choice complements the Theory of Practice and vice versa.

When we shift the focus to moments of rupture, the dichotomy between these two approaches also breaks down. Both have to deal with the same analytical challenges. Times of disruption are indeed times when dispositions at first become irrelevant. They are also times in which individual actors are at a loss to map out the likelihood of future scenarios and to deploy a line of conduct drawing on such assessments. The issue is to figure out how actors deal with such uncertainty. In a rather paradoxical way, it is because these moments call into question the predicates of both theories that these are compelled to join analytical forces.

The organization of this paper follows these few considerations. The first section outlines the main points of divergence between the Theory of Practice and Rational Choice when we investigate processes of change that take place in the long run. In a second step, I challenge these apparent divergences in light of a specific case that describes the shift in matrimonial norms and practices that occurred in Western Europe in the central middle ages. The last two sections are devoted to the analysis of moments of rupture. The third section discusses Bourdieu's suggestion that Rational Choice, if it has any relevance, is most appropriate for the study of crisis conjunctures. Taking issue with this contention in the last section, I highlight how both approaches complement each other when the focus is on situations of disruption.

In the process of developing these points, I elaborate two substantive claims. The first states the conditions under which actors are likely to make themselves the agents of normative constraints that limit their own political capacity. The second claim argues for the central role played by epistemic beliefs—i.e., beliefs about mutual beliefs—in the dynamics of crisis situations. Moments of rupture exacerbate actors' uncertainty about social bearings and positional logics. Individuals regain a sense of bearing and group affiliation by appraising the frames and the beliefs which they impute to peers, competitors, and opponents.

Long waves, slow motion

Structural history

History is structural history—Bourdieu's claim.¹ It is history commanded by shifting objective relations. Individual actors have little say in the process. For one thing,

¹ "Only a structural history designed to grasp both the objective relations that obtain among the different institutions by virtue of their relative position in the social and academic hierarchies and the competitive struggles that oppose them can thus enable us to perceive the logic of invariant and inevitable processes where we usually see nothing but the chronological succession of arbitrary and contingent events" (Bourdieu 1996a: 198).

changes that initiate shifts in structures of opportunities and constraints are exogenous to actors' field of practice. Actors do not properly speaking orchestrate the shifts. At best they take advantage of new opportunities. For instance the emergence of management schools endowed with considerable social prestige in the French education system at the turn of the 1970s resulted from "the convergence of two independent processes, each stemming from a specific need: on the one hand, the development of a new educative demand ...; on the other hand, the increase...in the supply of jobs for technicians, engineers, and commercial managers, corresponding to transformations in the economic field, such as the growth in international trade" (Bourdieu 1996a: 217). This remark is not confined to the specific case of shifts in the French educational system. As Calhoun (1995: 143) points out, Bourdieu's analysis of ruptures in traditional practices in Kabalia rests on a similar diagnosis.

Actors react to these exogenous changes in light of their resources and dispositions. These, however, are not under their direct purview. Resources, whatever the type of capital under consideration—economic, cultural or social (Bourdieu 1986: 243)—are indexed on social positions (broadly defined in terms of class and class trajectory). Dispositions for their part elude the grip of an autonomous will: they are, *qua* dispositions, internalized. They have, in addition, a structural dimension: there is a structural homology between the resources and constraints inherent to the social relations which actors inhabit—or rather, which inhabit them—and the perceptive and interpretive schemes which they mobilize to define the situations they face, i.e., their mental landscape. If actors have the resources and dispositions allowing them to take advantage of the shift, changes in objective relations provide them with new opportunities. If they lack these resources or dispositions, the shift can turn out to be a source of deprivation.

These few considerations explain why structural transformations belong to the temporal realm of slow motion. Individuals do not master their own rationality. They inherit a set of dispositions that sets internal limits to their own capacity for action and frames their sense of the possible. Since this set of dispositions eludes their conscious mastery, it is also resilient in the face of external change. This resilience reflects not only the structural character of this practical sense—the *habitus* is "incorporated structure" (Bourdieu 1998: vii)—but also its genetic mode. Referring to the "process of adjustment of hopes to opportunities, of aspirations to accomplishments and in particular the work of disinvestment required in order to accept a lesser fate," Bourdieu notes that this is a "slow and uneven transformation of minds" (1988: 166).

Entrepreneurs

For Rational Choice, by contrast, epochal change lies more in the hands of historical actors, at least in theory (North 1981: 1-12).² These enact change by pursuing strategies of aggrandizement and institutional innovations that endure to the extent

² Since "rational choice" designates both a theoretical framework and a type of action, I capitalize the terms whenever I refer to the framework to avoid any ambiguity about the referent.

that they provide them with a comparative advantage over their competitors (Davis and North 1970: 139). Thus, in this framework, historical actors have more leeway to overcome the constraints they face than the Theory of Practice would lead us to assume. The conceptual salience of the figure of the entrepreneur in Rational Choice analyses of historical change is revealing in this regard. The entrepreneur relies on innovative lines of action that are irreducible to contextual and structural conditions. These new lines of action are *sui generis*. An entrepreneur's ability to displace constraints and to open up opportunities depends, furthermore, on the ability to elicit collective efforts oriented towards this purpose (Popkin 1988: 16-17, 20-21; Chong 1991: 125-26).

Driven by the inescapable force of self-interest and maximization, individuals accumulate resources, displace competitors and, in the process, devise institutions geared to the consolidation of their power.³ When the rules governing these institutions elude the instability inherent to personal and arbitrary power—what Weber calls “patrimonial power”—while creating incentives and opportunities for productive work, rent situations are more difficult to sustain. When, on the other hand, these requirements do not obtain, institutions create the conditions of their own demise (North 1990: 108-109). Underlying this representation of structural shifts is an evolutionary model guided by the principle of comparative efficiency.

Costs and constraints

If we recapitulate these two conceptions of historical change from afar, the chiasm looks sharp. Disregarding the issues of cognitive dispositions, Rational Choice postulates a timeless model of action.⁴ True, values vary across groups and epochs (North 1981: 49). The point, however, is not to document this variation but rather to investigate how individuals seek to optimize their interests given the constraints they face. As a result, Rational Choice overlooks the extent to which structures of relations shape mental structures. The Theory of Practice, by contrast sets the issue of mental structures at the core of its programmatic agenda. The underlying

³ Strategies of optimization are not confined to material interests and, contrary to O'Neill's (2001: 259) contention, there is no reason to presume that the models of maximizing behaviors elaborated by Rational Choice are only geared to material considerations. Two examples among others: Olson (1965: 60-61) conceptualizes social incentives as selective incentives for collective action; Lindenberg's (1989: 53) theory of revolutions assumes that “all human beings aspire to maximize at least two things: social approval and physical well-being.” It is indicative in this regard that none of the four assumptions which Green and Shapiro (1994: 14-15) identify as “commanding widespread agreement among rational choice theorists” (p. 15) refer explicitly to material stakes. These four widely shared assumptions are: (1) utility maximization, (2) a consistency requirement, (3) expected utility maximization for choices under uncertainty and (4) the definition of individual actors as the relevant maximizing agents. Elster (2000) states the matter plainly: “rational choice theory can easily accommodate nonmaterial or nonselfish interests. What matters is whether the actors pursue their goals in an instrumentally rational manner, not whether these goals are defined in terms of material self-interests” (p. 692).

⁴ As Kiser and Schneider (1995) put it in their reply to Gorski (1995) regarding the efficiency of the Prussian administrative system in the eighteenth century: “Actors are always assumed to be equally rational, although some may have better information than others” (p. 789). The critique of the postulate of universal invariance is of course not unique to Bourdieu: Somers (1998: 767) and Adams (1999: 26) for instance make the same point.

anthropology is deeply historical. Bourdieu is closer to the disciplinary ethos of the historians than the Rational Choice analysts.

Yet, as we get closer to processes of historical change for the purpose of identifying the collective logic underlying these processes, the theoretical chiasm between these two frameworks loses its edge. Rational Choice analysts do not elude the question of external constraints—quite the opposite.⁵ Their agenda is centered on the optimization (writ large) of decisions under constraints.⁶ Constraints motivate the definition of individual choice as a research problem (Gambetta 1987, chapter 3). These constraints lie in the amount and the type of resources available for the specific choice being considered, and in the range of options associated with this choice. They also lie in the lines of conduct which other actors can be expected to follow and which have consequences for the choice in question. These constraints are the analytical equivalent of objective relations in the framework of the theory of Practice.

Moreover, whether we adopt the standpoint of one framework or the other, the focus is primarily on historical actors who seek to preserve, consolidate, or to expand their interests (Biernacki 1995: 22; Postone et al. 1993: 5; Steinmetz's (1999: 28).⁷ These are the prime motives emerging from social interactions over the long run. To assess the dynamic of these interactions, it is necessary to trace the ideological layout of different groups' ethos *and* the strategic lines of conduct emerging from conflict and cooperation (Laitin 1986: 11-16; 1992: ix-x, 47, 60-65). The habitus as such "cannot explain change as arising from within the operation of structures" (Sewell 1992: 16).

A case of normative shift

Let me elaborate this claim in light of a specific case. This case documents the emergence of matrimonial norms regulated by the church in Western Europe in the central Middle Ages. Until the end of the Eleventh Century, European male nobles disregarded Church rules that forbade them to repudiate their wives and marry their cousins. Repudiation and endogamy were critical to strategies of political and military aggrandizement. A century later, ecclesiastical precepts were gaining precedence over such practices (Duby 1983: 189; Herlihy 1985: 86; Brundage 1987: 184). Aristocrats no longer considered their matrimonial practices outside the normative bearings set by the church. This does not mean that they never breached

⁵ For instance, Levi explicitly states that her Rational Choice explanation of tax systems puts primary emphasis on "the variation in the constraints that modify behavior" (Levi 1988: 3). The action lies "in the constraints on ruler behavior" (Levi 1988: 10).

⁶ I add the qualification "writ large" since cost minimization is a form of optimization in a context in which all the options available are costly to the actor.

⁷ "Like rational choice theorists, [Bourdieu] underscores the agents' *unceasing* manipulation of their symbolic and material environment" (Biernacki 1995: 22; my emphasis). "Bourdieu ... evokes a quasi-Hobbesian world of struggle for competitive advantage, one that in many ways recalls microeconomic descriptions of rational actors pursuing their material interests" (Steinmetz 1999: 28). Postone et al. (1993) make a consonant observation: "Unaware of some true possibilities, unable to take full advantage or conceive of other possibilities due to their class habitus, agents nonetheless seek to *maximize* benefits, given their relational position within a field" (p. 5; my emphasis).

these prohibitions. But any breach had a cost, psychological and social, which is another way of saying that the norm had become effective.

If the point is to contrast the relative merits of Rational Choice and the Theory of Practice applied to the study of processes of historical change, this is a very interesting case. Because they put at the center of the state symbolic categories, practices and strategic interests, normative shifts are good tests to assess the explanatory relevance of theories of change and their ability to capture the processes at play. Furthermore, in the present case, there is no obvious explanation of the shift. In terms of coercive capacity, Roman prelates were weak actors compared to great princes. The shift in practice cannot therefore be explained in terms of power imbalance. Nor can it be explained as the outcome of moral persuasion. At first, male aristocrats fiercely resisted the church matrimonial proscriptions. Letting clerics regulate their matrimonial choices imperiled their crucial political and economic interests. Yet, the shift in matrimonial practices went along with a shift in normative dispositions.

The lineage of blood

To fully assess the scope of this transformative process, it is worth reconstituting the logic of matrimonial practice which until the Twelfth Century regulated aristocrats' marriage and repudiation decisions. Heads of aristocratic houses had, in the last centuries of the millennium, two central preoccupations: the consolidation of a patrimony and the perpetuation of familial "honor" (Duby 1983: 48). Matrimonial choices were primarily intended to consolidate political alliances and, consequently, to increase economic and symbolic capital. Matrimonial alliances were a "substitute for political maneuvering" (Poly and Bournazel 1991: 92). The notion of "honor" "fused the legal notion of all the property belonging to the lord and the moral connotation attached to the prestige arising out of these possessions and positions" (Duby 1983: 291). Marriage established property rights and perpetuated the value of one's blood. Blood was the "vehicle of nobility" (Poly and Bournazel 1991: 89), the depository of this knightly virtue which the texts of the twelfth century, explains Duby, described as *probitas*, "a valor of body and soul which produce both prowess and magnanimity" (Duby 1983: 37). It is through the legacy of blood that the "glory of a race," the supreme quality defining nobility, was handed over to the next generation.

The role of women in this symbolic economy of marriage was crucial. As mothers, women held a decisive role in the hereditary transmission of honor. It was commonly believed that they produced sperm and that, through sexual union, they mingled their blood with that of their lord (Thomasset 1981: 5). The choice of a wife had therefore to satisfy considerations of honor. Blood had to be propagated in such a way that it did not degenerate. Preference was given to a spouse of at least equal rank. Women were furthermore included in the political economy of vassalic ties and territorial alliances as daughters and future wives. Their probability of being married and repudiated depended on their inclusion in these two spheres of exchange. The importance granted to the continuance of a lineage conditioned choices of repudiation and divorce. A wife had to fulfill the need to perpetuate a lineage. If she could not beget a son, she put in jeopardy the

very existence of the lineage and was therefore likely to be dismissed. “Marrying the daughters of Kings was worth doing only if they produced male heirs” (Duby 1978: 49).

Endogamous practices were symbolically and politically appealing in two respects. First, they ensured that the intrinsic quality of the dynastic blood would be passed on to the next generation without risks of “degeneration.” Second, endogamy preserved family property (Duby 1978: 8). On both counts (the genetic economy of “valor” and the political economy of patrimony) marriage was supposed to maintain or increase the value of one’s capital. Legally binding, it entailed a certain number of rights which had distributional consequences. It discriminated between legitimate heirs and bastards. Strategies of social reproduction were doomed to failure if unions were not commonly acknowledged as legitimate. The handing over to the next generation of a “name” and, associated with it, of a symbolic and economic capital, required the conclusion of lawful marriages. Aristocrats were determined to manipulate this institution in order to fulfill their strategic goals.

Which capacities?

Through the marriage regulations set by canonical law, church leaders were directly threatening this economy of practice. For aristocrats, the stakes were therefore enormous. This explains why at first they fiercely resisted these normative injunctions. Yet, in the end, Roman prelates prevailed. The transformative process was far-reaching and durable. It marked the shift from one set of dispositions to another. The research problem then is to account for this shift. This problem can be addressed from either a Rational Choice perspective or within the framework of the Theory of Practice. Neither approach alone adequately accounts for the shift.

A Rational Choice approach analyzes shifts in rules of conduct as the byproduct of a structure of strategic interactions between those to whose action these normative regulations are directed (“target actors”) and those who strive to put them into effect (claimants or “beneficiary actors”) (Coleman 1990: 247). In this model, beneficiary actors are in a position to actualize their normative demands if they gain enough leverage. Claimants’ relative bargaining power is equated with their degree of control over resources on which target actors depend. It is determined by their capacity to “help or hurt” target actors (Coleman 1990: 783). Crucial is the beneficiary actors’ capacity to take over strategic resources and, in doing so, to increase their bargaining leverage. Asymmetries in sanctioning capacity are translated into transfers of right.

The challenge for this explanatory model is to explain how beneficiary actors acquire the right to control the actions of target actors. What does a transfer of rights mean when there is no third party to invest beneficiary actors with the power or authority to carry out their claims at regulation and to warrant the due enforcement of these claims? How are these “rights” sustained? If force is the only element at play, it will hardly bring about durable shifts in normative principles of conduct. To put otherwise: if these rights are sustained by force alone, then we can reasonably doubt the emergence of normative dispositions.

Coercive pressure is not a factor of norm internalization (Aronson and Carlsmith 1963; Joule and Beauvois 2006: 84, 86–87).

A change in the allocation of rights implies some form of consensus or “quasi-voluntary compliance” (Levi 1988: 52) among target actors. The point is indeed central to Coleman’s definition of right: “An actor has a right to carry out an action or to have an action carried out when all who are affected by exercise of that right *accept the action without dispute*” (Coleman 1990: 50; my emphasis). The right to carry out an action thus implies the consent of those affected by the exercise of that right. This observation has broad analytical significance. If consent is lacking, the right loses its effectiveness, which means that we also need to understand what makes the emergence of consent possible. A model framed in terms of relative bargaining power provides no clue regarding this issue.

The predictive power of this explanatory model is furthermore dubious whenever we are dealing with cases in which it is not clear who has an advantage in terms of coercive resource. Roman prelates were “weak” actors in the sense that they did not always match great lords in terms of military resources. The papacy did not have regular armies except those of the provinces of Rome. It had to rely on the services of mercenaries and feudal armies. Gregory VII for instance summoned his Norman friends in defense of Rome against Henri IV at the height of the investiture struggle (Cantor 1993: 271). This is not to deny that “in wealth, power, and aptitude for command (the) great lords of the Church (abbots, bishops and archbishops) were the equals of the greatest military barons” (Bloch 1961: 345). However, it was not rare for bishops and archbishops to ally with princes against the papacy.

From the viewpoint of the Theory of Practice, the key causal factors are those determining the transformation of normative preferences. Shifts in normative ideals cannot be dissociated from the structures in which they take place. New rules of conduct emerge insofar as social practices are being adjusted to “changes in the external conditions of social life which carry in their wake modifications of the empirically prevailing “consensual understandings” (Weber 1978: 755). This argument revolves around a claim about the disciplining of practices: material constraints are “converted into self-restraints” as Elias (1994: 443) puts it to describe the thrust of the civilization process. Gorski (1993: 270) elaborates this argument with an eye on the practical consequences of institutionalized rituals and settings. Habituation is the key. This process explains how normative definitions of the licit come to pervade commonsensical representations of the social reality—how, in other words, they become “hegemonic” (Williams 1982: 110) or “doxic” (Bourdieu 1998: 57) representations within the field of practice being considered.

The key problem here is to explain how these structures—fixed patterns of interaction, institutional settings—emerge in the first place. For instance, it is not enough to state that Roman prelates imposed their normative regulations upon reluctant aristocrats by asserting their monopoly over the symbolic and legal definition of marriage as long as we do not specify how the prelates acquired this monopoly. Arguments framed in strict legalist or symbolic terms—e.g., the Roman prelates took hold of the legal definition of marriage and implemented institutional rituals emphasizing its sacred character—still need to account for actors’ political capacity, or incapacity, to mold practices according to legal and symbolic claims.

Internalization through competition

These two explanatory models offer theoretically different accounts of the transformative process whereby norms are converted into effective rules of conduct. Interestingly, each model points to the possible relevance of the alternative model. An analysis of preference shifts along the lines set by the Theory of Practice calls for an examination of the processes of resource distribution underlying this transformation. We can reasonably expect that the development of disciplinary practices, for instance, goes along with a reconfiguration of power relations. Analyses of changes in relative bargaining power draw attention to shifting expectations regarding structures of rights. Processes of right appropriation are necessarily symbolically constructed.

Claimants first need to make their normative claims credible. They cannot do so if they cannot ensure the services of agents endowed with the task of norm enforcement. Second, once these normative claims have become credible, claimants are able to impose their normative injunctions in the absence of a clear-cut coercive advantage if target actors use these injunctions to advance their own interests. The emergence of the normative order results from this dynamic of strategic interactions. In the present case, the transition to a regime of normative enforcement occurred as a result of the aristocrats' appropriation of the church's normative claims—to check rivals and possible competitors.

Two analytical features of this explanation are worth underlining. First, the transformative process I have described is of broad analytical relevance: it can be theorized without reference to the specificity of the case. Actors' interest in compliance (Weber) is the consequence of a shift in cost structure. But this shift is the aggregated outcome of actors' individual adjustments to new normative demands. The key point is to assess whether, and how, target actors develop a "regulatory interest" (Heckathorn 1989: 78), that is, an interest in sanctioning deviants. My broader argument is that when competitive relations among actors is pervasive or becomes more intense, they have indeed an interest in invoking prohibitive rules to limit the margin of maneuver of their competitors. By the same token, these actors contribute to implementing rules that limit their own margin of maneuver (Ermakoff 1997: 416).

This argument is of relevance to the study of any transition processes in which actors interacting with one another develop an interest in self-regulation. Consider the case of the Dutch regent families in the seventeenth century analyzed by Adams (2005). Acting on behalf of their family lineage and in the name of a patriarchal definition of their honor, the regents were vying for political and corporate offices in a decentralized setting. This competition was normatively regulated: "Most high offices in the United Provinces could not legally be directly bought and sold, or even juridically inherited, although elites did purchase lesser but lucrative state offices for their progeny" (Adams 2005: 81). The conditions under which this normative regime came into being illustrate the mechanism of self-imposition I have outlined. It is the regents who pushed for the legal prohibition of venal office holding and invoked these rules against their competitors (Adams 2005: 93–94, 145–146).

Note that in this explanatory framework there is no strict analytical divide between strategies and dispositions. This is the second feature worthy of

mention. Actors unfold their lines of action in social and institutional settings charged with symbolic meanings. They are highly strategic when they pursue what they deem to be their interests and seek to assess the probable consequences of moves and countermoves. This does not prevent them from acquiring new dispositions as they develop lines of action in response to new challenges. Lo and behold, in the process of invoking a set of normative precepts to curtail the margin of maneuver of foes and competitors, actors contribute to making these precepts a set of effective constraints. De facto, any invocation amounts to an endorsement of constraints imposed upon their own choice (Ermakoff 1997: 418).

This argument is substantively different from the claim that a rule acquires moral force when “everyone (or almost everyone) in the relevant community follow the rule” and “it is each individual’s interest that the people with whom he deals follow the rule, provided that he follows it too” (Sugden 1986: 166, 172). Two remarks are in order. For one thing, a behavioral consensus—“almost everyone follows the norm”—describes a *state* of relations which is self-perpetuating to the extent that actors find it in their interest to abide by the consensus. The reference point is the status quo (Sugden 1986: 173). The argument about normative endorsement which I have just presented is about the *process* of endorsement.

Further, a unanimous or quasi-unanimous behavioral endorsement does not rule out the possibility that everyone following the convention actually despise it (Kuran 1991: 17–19). In this case, the convention has no moral force. In contrast, I have argued that a norm *acquires* moral force when it is *invoked* against peers. The very fact of invoking the norm invests it with valence for those who invoke it in the first place. These actors make themselves the agents of a moral conception and this implies a modicum of moral endorsement on their part. Subsequently, as “activities are invested with feelings of shame,” self-control “becomes more and more stable” (Duby 1980: 20).

One could object that there is no want of Tartuffe and cynics in this world and that an instrumental use of normative sanction always remains a possibility, as a Rational Choice analysis would lead us to expect. To this possible objection, my answer is twofold. First, invoking a norm in a regular fashion to shape or curb the behavior of others without oneself endorsing the prescription implies indeed a significant dose of cynicism. The stance is viable over time if it is not experienced as a source of dissonance. The capacity to suppress such dissonance is unevenly distributed in any large and uncoordinated group—those groups which Olson (1965: 50) calls “latent.” A reasonable hypothesis is that in such groups, cynicism is a luxury for which only a small minority has a sustained capacity and that the experience of dissonance is the mode when norm invocation is inconsistent with private beliefs. For those modal individuals, the “dissipation of expressive dissonance through internalization” (Kuran 1998: 150) then is to be expected.

The second answer builds on the first one. It may be that actors informally coordinate to adopt a cynical stance. This implicit understanding makes cynicism sustainable over time: the implicit norm in this configuration becomes a lack of deep commitment to the norm being invoked. But if beneficiary actors are also

target actors the norm invoked to regulate the behaviors of peers loses regulatory force. The norm is subverted from the inside by those who invoke it. It loses validity. Put more broadly: cynical dispositions when they get institutionalized subvert the prospect of effective normative claims since the claims being set forth lack credibility. Hypocrisy can start up a process of norm implementation by making some actors willing to bear the cost of sanctioning others (Heckathorn 1989: 97). It cannot be a principle of collective regulation when it becomes widely diffused.

Breaks and ruptures

What about moments of rupture, that is, conjunctures in which institutional and habitual practices break down or become open to question? Do we have grounds to believe that the Theory of Practice and Rational Choice complement one another for the study of processes of change in such situations? I address this question in three steps. First, drawing on Bourdieu's general remarks, I provide a characterization of these moments centered on the decoupling between representations and practices. Second, I outline the a priori rationale for the claim that instrumental action is prevalent in such moments. Third, I challenge this claim by showing that moments of disjuncture can also undercut the very capacity to exercise strategic rationality. Hence, these situations elude the exclusive grip of either the Theory of Practice or Rational Choice. The point justifies the argument about complementarity. These two approaches need one another because they cannot be self-sufficient.

Hiatus

Let us start with situations in which habits and institutions mold behaviors in an unproblematic fashion. Such is the realm of the habitus, marked by a deep concordance between actors' dispositions and their experience of social relations. Interactions display enough regularity, subjective consistency and predictability to confirm the categories and presuppositions which actors draw on as they enter these realms of interactions. As a result, actors develop a practical understanding of the logic immanent to these realms of activity. Being practical, this knowledge needs not be made explicit. Actors constantly put it into practice. The stability and the resilience of the habitus as an incorporated system of dispositions is based on these premises. So is its rationality. The practical reason actors enact through their habitus is a reason which tends to forget itself. That does not mean that actors will not submit their relation with others to a cost/benefit grid of reading. An instrumental understanding of social relations may actually be part and parcel of their habitus. But the grid is so natural that it is spontaneous, for the most part irreflexive and taken for granted.

When this concordance is disrupted, on the other hand, actors lose their bearings. The habitus no longer provides individuals with a valid grid of reading, valid in the

sense that armed with these schemes of classification individuals can simultaneously decipher and predict what awaits them. These are conjunctures in which dispositions are “out of sync,” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 130), that is, more specifically, “out of line with the field and with ‘collective expectations’ which are constitutive of its normality. This is the case, in particular, when a field undergoes a major crisis and its regularities (even its rules) are profoundly changed” (Bourdieu 2000: 160). Bourdieu illustrates these times of disjuncture with a reference to “abrupt encounters between civilizations linked to the colonial situations” (p. 161), instances of quick social mobility, the self-defeating strategies of social reproduction among peasant Béarn families in the 1960s (Bourdieu 1962, 1989), or the crisis of the French academic field in the 1960s (Bourdieu 1988).

Examples of this class of conjunctures abound. As the cases just cited indicate, there is no reason to confine them the notion of “fields”—if by “field we mean a pattern of interactions geared to incentives and rewards, and organized around more or less explicit rules. These conjunctures vary in scope and intensity. Laitin (1998: 85-104) documents a typical example of large-scale and consequential institutional upside-down with the “double cataclysm” experienced by the Russian-speaking populations in the newly independent Union republics: the passage in 1989 of laws nationalizing the titular languages as the “state languages” and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Consciousness, reflexivity, and instrumental action

These upside-downs affect subjective experience in two crucial ways. First, practices lose their familiar character. They become outlandish and somewhat foreign to the mind. The circumstances put them at bay. At times they seem to be out of reach. With the disappearance of familiarity vanishes the feeling of being in command if only in the minimal sense of knowing what to expect. The outlandish status of disrupted practices comes along with the more or less intuitive understanding of unpredictability. Second, practices undergoing this process of disruption become very much present to the mind. They acquire a presence and visibility which routine conjunctures obfuscate under the veneer of their obviousness. The disruption brings about greater consciousness (Bourdieu 2000: 160).⁸

The identity crisis experienced by Russians in the Union Republics at the turn of the 1990s is a case in point. Till then, their “natural” world had been monolingualism (Laitin 1998: 8). As one of Laitin’s informants pointed out to him, they could travel seven time zones and “all they needed was Russian” (p. 9). In this institutional and cultural universe, they “were protected from coming to terms with their “minority status” (Laitin 1998: 69, 87). The collapse of the Soviet Union and the change in status of titular language put a sudden end to this natural world of shared assumptions. Now Russians living in the near abroad could no longer take for granted the primacy of their language. Nor could they entertain any more the leisure

⁸ See Durkheim (1983): “Consciousness and reflection only awaken when habit is disrupted” (p. 79-80) (quoted by Camic 1986: 1052).

of relegating titular languages to one background corner of their mind. Their relation to language suddenly became highly problematic. “What they faced, rather immediately, was a sense of dread, indignity, and uncertainty” (Laitin: 105).

Thus, moments of disruption compel individuals to bring assumptions about themselves and others to the fore of their consciousness. In other words, these moments compel individuals to objectify their beliefs. Items of the social world previously taken for granted are now objects of conscious and self-reflexive consideration. This heightened degree of reflexivity and consciousness is a prerequisite for Rational Choice. It goes along with a greater capacity to reflect on consequences, degrees of likelihood, costs and benefits and alternative lines of conduct. By the same token, this process of objectifying beliefs and practices creates the possibility for instrumental rationality. As beliefs and practices get removed from the realm of the obvious, it becomes possible to put them to use for ends other than themselves.

For the Theory of Practice, consciousness is the hallmark of Rational Choice. The rationality of Rational Choice designates a *conscious* mode of action whereby actors intentionally select a course of action after having assessed the probable consequences of alternative options.⁹ If we endorse this characterization, we should conclude that times of crisis and disruption are the domain of predilection of Rational Choice. Bourdieu explicitly states the possibility of a division of intellectual labor, one in which crisis situations devolve upon Rational Choice while the Theory of Practice reserves for itself routine conjunctures. “Times of crisis, in which the routine adjustment of subjective and objective structures is brutally disrupted constitute a class of circumstances when indeed “rational choice” may take over, at least among those agents who are in a position to be rational” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 131).

As stated, this conception leaves aside the reference to optimization. If instead of consciousness we emphasize optimization, Bourdieu’s proposal for a division of intellectual labor can be reformulated as follows. The uncertainty generated by the breakdown of an institutional or habitual repertoire makes actors more sensitive to the prospect of possible costs (Laitin 1998: 118). Individuals realize that their welfare is at stake. As a result they pay greater attention and effort to assessing risks and consequences (Schumpeter 1942: 253-254).¹⁰ This type of assessment is the subject matter of Rational Choice. Individuals facing the prospect of a cost become primarily concerned about avoiding it (Lindenberg 1989: 55). We assess risks for the purpose of minimizing them in a situation in which different lines of conduct are potentially costly.

⁹ “The ‘rational actor’ theory, which seeks the ‘origin’ of acts, strictly economic or not, in an ‘intention’ of ‘consciousness’, is often associated with a narrow conception of the ‘rationality’ of practices, an economism which regards as rational ... those practices that are *consciously oriented* by the pursuit of maximum (economic) profit at minimum (economic) cost” (Bourdieu 1990: 50; my emphasis). By contrast, “the habitus is a spontaneity without consciousness or will” (Bourdieu 1990: 56). See also the exchange with Wacquant: Rational Choice conceives action as determined by the conscious aiming at goals explicitly defined (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 125).

¹⁰ To reiterate the point I made earlier: there is no reason to confine the realm of application of Rational Choice to material considerations. See Laitin (1998) reflecting on strategies of linguistic and identity adaptation: it is mistaken to believe that “the only form of rational calculation is that of material benefits” (p. 56).

Theoretical incompleteness

In spite of this a priori justification, the prospect—even qualified—of apportioning classes of conjunctures is questionable for two reasons. First, individuals can be trapped in a type of uncertainty preventing them from acting on the incentive to be more instrumental and strategic. For instance, the breakdown of habitual and institutional patterns is so unprecedented that it is not even clear what the options are (Laitin 1998: 24). Or the uncertainty elicited by a disruptive event is such that individuals cannot ascertain degrees of likelihood and cannot as a result assess risks properly speaking (Knight 1923: 231–232). If so, contextual conditions undermine the very capacity to exercise instrumental rationality.

Rational Choice pundits do point to these restrictive conditions when they specify the domain assumptions of the theory. Whether we consider the issue in static or dynamic terms, the emphasis is on the ability to learn in a way and in an environment that are conducive to resilient decision rules—“decision rules that are found to work over a range of situations and hence are no longer revised appreciably as more experience accumulates” (Lucas 1987: 218). These contextual requirements define a class of decision problems for which (i) the range of options is limited; (ii) incentives are well-defined; and (iii) the actor can assess how her choice will affect her welfare (Taylor 1988: 90–91). Lucas (1987), an exponent of the Rational expectations approach, furthermore refers to “steady states of some adaptive process” (p. 218). In short, the environment approximates an equilibrium situation (Winter 1987: 245; North 1990: 22).

Herbert Simon’s general remarks regarding modes of decision-making underscore this point further. Simon (1978) observes that overlooking the very processes whereby rational actors reach their decisions is an acceptable research strategy in the case of “rational decision in static, relatively simple problem situations where it might be assumed that additional computational time or power could not change the outcome” (p. 14). For decisions in highly uncertain situations, this explanatory strategy becomes problematic.¹¹ Then we need to pay attention to: how agents gather their information, which information they deem relevant, what retains their attention and the decision criteria or heuristics they rely on (Tversky and Kahneman 1986). The theory of Practice becomes relevant at this juncture insofar as the categories inherited from past practices highlight how actors’ attention is structured, how they search for information, which information they decide to focus on, and how they treat it.

Second—and related—times of breakdown elicit a broad variety of types of action from the most irreflexive and emotional to the most cold-blooded and instrumental. For instance, Bourdieu offers an account of the crisis of May 1968 in France in which shared deprivation is a key determinant of action. In this account, the “devaluation of academic diplomas” contributed to a discrepancy between aspirations and abilities (“maladjusted expectations”) which in turn

¹¹ “The strategy does not work, however, when we are seeking to explain the decision maker’s behavior in complex, dynamic circumstances that involve a great deal of uncertainty, and that make severe demands upon his attention” (Simon 1978: 14).

created a sense of “dispossession” (Bourdieu 1988: 163: 169: 166). This account puts the emphasis on a state of mind marked by frustration and psychological tension. The greater the gap between expectations and opportunities, the greater the tension (Bourdieu 1988: 163).¹²

Combined with this specific account is a general characterization of moments of crisis as moments characterized by the “intrusion of the possibility of novelty,” which Bourdieu (1988) identifies as the “unique criterion of definition of the critical situation” (p. 162). In such conjunctures, “all futures appear possible, and are indeed so to a certain extent, for that very reason” (p. 162).¹³ These are highly expressive moments. People realize that the conjuncture is propitious to a restructuring of social relations. This shared perception gives way to a “moment of madness” (Zolberg 1972: 196–197) in part because it is pervaded with an “illusion of spontaneity” (Bourdieu 1988: 190–193).¹⁴ In May 1968, according to Bourdieu, this illusion was particularly prevalent (Bourdieu 1988: 190).¹⁵

Both the specific (“Maladjusted expectations”) and the general (“Everything is possible”) account of moments of disruption are at odds with the conception of strategic rationality endorsed by Rational Choice. The dispossession argument implicitly portrays people as hostage of a sense of deprivation. Individuals may act on this feeling in circumstances which they view as appropriate or simply permissive. When they do so, frustration and anger are the main motivations. These beget hostility and violence. There is little room in this portrayal for rationality in the sense postulated by Rational Choice. Strategic models of collective behavior have been constructed *against* representations of the individual actor as subdued to emotional and irreflexive subjective states (Coleman 1990: 197–198).¹⁶

¹² “The critical tension is all the stronger, the longer the distance between reality and the representation of the self and of a social future has been maintained, necessitating a greater *psychological* effort” (Bourdieu 1988: 168; my emphasis).

¹³ As a political slogan, “all is possible” can be traced to Marceau Pivert, a leader of the French Socialist party (SFIO), reacting to, and celebrating, the electoral victory of the leftist Popular Front in the spring of 1936.

¹⁴ The representation of the future as open to many possible worlds is a running thread of Zolberg’s (1972: 185, 196) description of “moments of madness.” Zolberg (1972: 191–196) construes the revolution of February 1848 as a paradigmatic instance of such moments with extensive references to Flaubert, Tocqueville and May 1968. Sewell’s (1985: 69) descriptive account of the night of 4 August 1789 can be interpreted from a similar perspective.

¹⁵ Bourdieu (1988: 159) opens the chapter of *Homo Academicus* devoted to the notion of “critical moment” with a quote of Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education* describing Paris in the wake of the 22–24 February 1848 revolution. It is not by chance that both May 1968 and the February 1848 revolution are also at the center of the stage in Zolberg’s (1972) descriptive analysis of “moments of madness.” Witnesses and contemporaries describe these events as liberating episodes yielding a profusion of words. To quote Flaubert: “subversive proposals proliferated.”

¹⁶ Given this variety of modal responses it is not surprising that when claims about action in times of rupture are cast in general and unconditional terms they lead to opposite theoretical conclusions. For Swidler (1986: 274), the prevalence of ideology is the defining feature of “unsettled times.” Taking stock of his empirical work on identity changes in the newly independent post-Soviet republics, Laitin (1998) comes to a conclusion that explicitly challenges this broad contention: “in unsettled times, people—at least those families with whom I and my fellow field researchers interacted—feel compelled to calculate and coordinate their calculation with others” (p. 24). In short, the uncertainty generated by the breakdown of institutions “breeds rationality” (p. 24).

Stances and alignments

I have opposed two objections to Bourdieu's suggestion that the Theory of Practice and Rational Choice could apportion classes of conjunctures. First, institutional and habitual breakdowns can generate a type of uncertainty preempting the incentive for instrumental rationality. The uncertainty is too pervasive and encompassing to allow the deciphering of options and the assessment of degrees of likelihood. Second, crises elicit a broad variety of modal responses. Some are at odds with instrumental rationality. These two objections point to two challenges for the analysis of change in these conjunctures. The first is to avoid the trap of a retrospective fallacy which interprets preferences as "revealed" by subsequent behavioral outcomes. The second is to account for the processes whereby individuals regain a sense of bearing and direction. Addressing the first challenge sets the contours of an agenda. The discussion of the second one highlights how a *pas de deux* between the Theory of Practice and Rational Choice is possible.

Positions, interpretations, interactions

To map out the likelihood distribution of different behavioral responses, structural positions provide a starting point. Positions shape assumptions, interests, and expectations. Within any structure—and this point applies in particular to the academic field in the 1960s—positions "motivate strategies aiming to transform [this structure], or to preserve it" (Bourdieu 1988: 128). Actors who run the show and enjoy their power seek to maintain the status quo insofar as they view this status quo as the warrant of their power. Those who feel marginalized or mistreated have an interest in calling it into question. Positions create a differentiated space of probabilities given the interests, dispositions and resources attached to them. This argument underlies Bourdieu's (1988: 149–150) broad claim that individual responses to a challenge need not be coordinated since structurally induced dispositions make them "objectively orchestrated" (p. 150).¹⁷

Yet, positions can only be a starting point. As Dobry (2001: 97) underscores against Bourdieu's (1990: 82–83) contention, we cannot presume that actors emerging as "radical" or "revolutionaries" in times of high challenge are necessarily those whose dispositions predestined them for this role. Stances *ex post* cannot simply be inferred from dispositions *ex ante*. Consider the Third Estate representatives who brought about the revolutionary breakthroughs of June, 1789. The

¹⁷ Agents "tend to generate practices which are *objectively orchestrated* and more or less adapted to objective requirements" because they "are endowed with transindividual dispositions" (Bourdieu 1988: 150; my emphasis). "[The] semblance of ideological diffusion results in fact from the multiplicity of simultaneous but independent, albeit objectively orchestrated, inventions, realized at different points of the social space, but in similar conditions, by agents endowed with similar systems of dispositions" (p. 176, emphasis in text). The theme of an "objective orchestration" is also present in *The Logic of Practice*: Bourdieu (1990) evokes a "spontaneous orchestration of dispositions" and a "conductorless orchestration" (p. 59). This theme underpins recurrent claims about the concordance between events and agents: "an event demands a determinate response only on those who are disposed to constitute it as such ... because they are endowed with a determinate type of dispositions" (Bourdieu 1977: 82–83).

overwhelming majority of them went to Versailles for the opening of the Estates General with a great deal of deference for the king and the model of authority which he embodied (Tackett 1996: 120). Seven weeks later, they stepped forward as the agents of a radical and unprecedented challenge to this model (Tackett 1996: 138–148).

Equally worthy of note is the fact that at times activists overlook the significance of the events which they are witnessing and, as a result, are caught off-guard. In May, 1968 well organized far-left groups decided not to take part in the setting up of barricades on May 10, 1968 (Gilcher-Holtey 1997: 171). This propensity of professional revolutionaries or radical activists to miss the train in the case of events which they have not initiated is not exceptional. Trotsky observes it in the case of February 1917: the Bolshevik leadership of St. Petersburg warned against a strike and “up to the last hour” downplayed the events (Trotsky 2001[1932]: 163). It may well be that the leaders of organized political groups are prone to misconstrue events as inconsequential, meaningless or too risky when these take place outside their purview.

If positions do not necessarily predetermine stances, we have reasons to question the hypothesis that without coordination individual behaviors get “objectively orchestrated.” In a strict sense, this hypothesis means that the members of a collective interpret an event or situation in the same way, and that they derive the same behavioral implication from this interpretation. The event is immediately readable and because it is unambiguously clear, those whose interests are affected react in the same way. Collective action then is the outcome of multiple individual actions informed by an obvious interpretation of the situation.¹⁸ Neither concerted action nor a diffusion process needs to be presumed.

Although this scenario is not impossible, it is nonetheless rare. Unexpected events do not produce their own interpretations. They call for them. Actors might at first try to apply interpretive schemes which they have used in the past with the hope that these still will have some purchase. The task is likely to be all the more arduous and unconvincing when the event is unexpected and challenging. Alternatively, actors might try to come up with an ad hoc understanding of the situation. The difficulty in this case is to make sure that this understanding has wide currency. In situations in which bearings get loose or lost, social acceptance becomes a gradient of validity.

Two implications follow. First, in situations of breakdown or rupture, the act of making sense of the situation is first and foremost an interactive process. Individuals situate their beliefs relative to others. In doubt, they seek to validate their understanding of the conjuncture given the beliefs which they impute to their peers, that is, those with whom they entertain a relationship of equivalence because of the situational constraints they face or because of some long-standing relation. Second, we should expect actors who have a stake in the outcome to

¹⁸ “What may appear as a sort of collective defense organized by the professional body is nothing more than the aggregated result of thousands of independent but orchestrated strategies of reproduction, thousands of acts which contribute effectively to the preservation of that body because they are the product of the sort of social conservation instinct that is the habitus of the members of a dominant group” (Bourdieu 1988: 150).

struggle to impose their definition of the situation (Dobry 1985: 184). The emergence of a meaningful representation of the event implies a process of diffusion or an agentic process of explicit meaning construction by some actors who are in a position to set interpretive claims.

To borrow another example from the events that ushered the French Revolution: initially, the members of the National Assembly viewed the taking of the Bastille (July 14, 1789) as “disastrous news” (Sewell 1996: 854) because of the killings which it had involved and the possibility of a backlash. Within a few days, however, when it appeared that Paris was not seething with violence and that the king was backing off, these representatives endorsed the portrayal of the Parisian uprising “as a legitimate revolt of liberty against despotism” (p. 855). Key to this shift in representations and frames were several statements by deputies (Mounier, Robespierre, Blesau, Buzot) theorizing the event as legitimate. The frame of the people as sovereign that emerged in the course of these interactions soon acquired a force of its own (Sewell 1999: 51-52).

Decisional processes, epistemic beliefs

The focus should therefore be on the dynamics of interactions within and among groups. The dynamics within groups condition the dynamics among them. Groups form and dissolve. They collapse under the weight of pressures or find the resources to stand up. For obvious reasons, collective stances and outcomes crucially shape patterns of confrontation and alliance among groups. If we want to understand what groups do and how they react to one another, we first need to understand how group members relate to one another. Whether they view themselves on the move or under challenge, individual actors cannot hope to mitigate the risks which they take or face without affiliating with others. Goldstone’s (1998: 841) observation that, in revolutionary conjunctures, actors “decide within the dynamics of groups” and “not as isolated individuals” can be extended to situations of collective disruptions.¹⁹ It is important for individuals not to be left stranded. Times of institutional breakdown generate an interest in coordination (Laitin 1998: 24).

We cannot study how the members of a collective relate to one another without examining how they form beliefs about each other. If the referential quality of precedents is too blurred or obscured given the particulars of the situation, actors then will look for symbolic clues which they can reasonably assume to make sense to those with whom they seek to coordinate (Schelling 1980: 90-118; O’Neill 2001:

¹⁹ A point of qualification: against Rational Choice models assuming self-propelling and autonomous monads (e.g., Tullock 1971), Goldstone (1994) posits a basic preference for group membership over isolation: “all other things equal, [people] prefer to act as part of groups” (p. 142). This critique of Rational Choice simply substitutes one anthropological assumption (individuals are self-propelling and autonomous monads) with another cast in opposite terms (people like to embed themselves in groups). In contradistinction with this analytical posture, I argue that there is no ground for endorsing one or the other. Preferences for individual actions versus group-oriented ones vary across contexts, settings and groups. The factors contributing to this variation call for systematic analysis. In situations of disruption and breakdown, both normative and strategic considerations are relevant for explaining how individual actors relate to groups.

45-62).²⁰ In short, to uncover the cognitive logic of this process it is necessary to investigate the matrix of tacit and symbolic knowledge which individual actors invoke to themselves in making inferences about others. Documenting these shared understandings—informed by frames and categories which they have enacted through events, rituals and practices—is the domain proper of the Theory of Practice.²¹

Rational Choice takes over at this point with models of strategic inference geared to risk minimization. As they react to moves, countermoves, claims and challenges by competitors, opponents or allies, individual and collective actors take stances that can lead them far away from their initial stand—stances in other words that neither they nor external observers would have anticipated given the dispositions at play. From this perspective, strategic interactions acquire a logic of their own which cannot be reduced to pre-existing structural conditions.²² The analogy with the game of chess is appropriate. Ingenuous moves and blunders can drastically alter the dynamics of the game. Alternatively, the configuration of the pieces can be such that the outcome is inexorable.

The conjunction of these two sets of imperatives—the formation of congruent beliefs on the one hand, the game of strategic moves among groups on the other—explains the possibility of drastic shifts in stance. As actors engage in mutually consistent beliefs about themselves in a context pervaded by uncertainty, they make themselves amenable to a process of realignment. The more disruptive the moment and the uncertainty it generates, the greater this possibility. Moments of breakdown thus contain the possibility of departures that can be considered radical with regard to the stock of dispositions and scripts constituting the group's repertoire (Suter 1997b: 555; 2001: 177).

To illustrate this point, let me again refer to June, 1789 in Versailles. As they started to meet as a collective body and to listen to one another the representatives of the Third Estate soon realized how much grounds they had in common. The oratory skills displayed by their colleagues were a source of pride. Simultaneously, much to their dismay given the solemnity and the pomp vested in the event, many found themselves exposed to the social contempt of aristocrats and churchmen. Third estate delegates developed a sense of collective identity through this conjunction of experiences as they interacted with one another and as they experienced the antagonisms of the first two estate delegates (Tackett 1996: 138-148). In this sense it can be said that the conjuncture made them revolutionaries rather than the other way around.²³

²⁰ For instance, O'Neill (2001) defines "focal symbols" as events that induce observers to adopt a common judgment about what move they will make in an important situation" (p. xii).

²¹ Dobry (1985: 200) underscores that in the absence of their usual bearings, actors' calculations are much more dependent on the availability of beliefs and events that have a focal quality given actors' "cultural stock."

²² Beissinger (2002: 140-143) demonstrates empirically this point in the case of nationalist mobilizations within the Soviet Union at the turn of the 1990s by showing that the predictive power of structural factors such as groups' degree of urbanization, cultural assimilation, and size decreases across time as the mobilization starts following a course of its own.

²³ Sohrabi (2005: 218-219) observes a similar—and quite peculiar at first glance—process in the case of the organization which emerged as the driving force of the constitutional revolution in the Ottoman empire (1908)—the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP): "it was the wave that swayed them in the direction of armed popular rebellion. It is indeed curious that an organization with such passive credentials that had disparaged violence and populism until 1905 would suddenly turn into a full-fledged revolutionary force in a short period between 1905 and 1908" (pp. 318-319).

In such context, innovations take the form of a transposition of schemes and dispositions from one realm of action to another (Sewell 1992: 17). May–June, 1968 in France is a case in point (Tilly 1986: 390). Since the turn of the century, strikes, rallies and demonstrations had been the dominant forms of contention used by protesters. On the evening of May 10, 1968, radical students demonstrating in the surroundings of the Sorbonne for the release of their comrades arrested a few days earlier revived a form of collective action—barricades—that had not been used in Paris since the Commune (1871). The barricades, however, did not have a military purpose. They could not have one (Gilcher-Holtey 1995: 241–242). Furthermore, students erected them without infusing them with revolutionary significance. On this occasion, their meaning was mainly expressive. It was of way of stating the occupation of a space (Gilcher-Holtey 1997:171; 2001:127).

The implications of these few observations for the pragmatics of research need to be emphasized. First, we cannot hope to decipher various processes of belief and expectation coordination without analyzing “how actors construe their experience” and without delving into the symbolic dimensions constituting their practices (Sewell 1980: 10–11). Studies deployed from different analytical perspectives but sharing the same concern for an in-depth engagement with the empirics of their case (e.g. Kalyvas 2006, Laitin 1998, Petersen 2001 on the side of Rational Choice; Sohrabi 2005 and Suter 1997a on the side of the Theory of cultural practice) concur on this point.²⁴

Second, moments when actors engage in this intense process of positioning and inference making provide a magnifying lens for analyzing how they deploy their knowledge of others and form mutually consistent expectations among themselves (Suter 1997b: 42). We should therefore focus on moments of collective and individual decisions with a close eye on the ways in which actors assess consequences, costs and benefits.²⁵ These decisional conjunctures are open to different alignment processes that can be theorized in light of their conditional factors (Ermakoff 2008: 181–210). Then we can observe how actors strategize their choice of words and symbols, and how their public stances affect the dynamic of group behaviors.

Conclusion: Controversia or disputatio?

“Bourdieu shares a good deal with Rational Choice” (Calhoun 1995: 141).
How good is the deal?

²⁴ Elster (2000) points to the problem when he faults the authors of the *Analytic Narratives* volume (Bates et al. 1998) for “showing little concern for intentions and beliefs” (p. 693). This is naturally more easily said than done and it is worth noting that Elster’s own research practice has eschewed this empirical imperative. The real challenge for formal theory applied to historical change is to confront the intricacies and complexities of the processes which it pretends to decipher.

²⁵ Delving into the symbolic understandings conditioning expectations about collective actions, Suter’s (1997a) study of the 1653 peasants’ war in Switzerland highlights key decision moments involving strategic risk assessments and the adoption of new organizational forms (see also Suter 2001: 180).

In the epilogue written to conclude a conference co-organized with James Coleman, Bourdieu (1991) reflected on the conditions propitious to “a space of discussion unified around purely scientific questions” away from “the intellectual protectionism fostered by all forms of closure and division into theoretical, methodological, and national traditions and schools” (p. 374). With this aim in mind, I first started this article by taking the proponents of Rational Choice and the Theory of Practice at their word: «there are striking theoretical divergences between us. We are not working with the same theoretical paradigms. » Taking them at their word, I examined how mutually exclusive these two frameworks are when we seek to account for the process of historical change.

If we confine ourselves to a broad outline, the discrepancy looks sharp. The Theory of Practice sets the locus of change in the logic inherent to structural relations at a societal level. Rational Choice identifies the locus of change in the conjoint effect of multiple strategic actions. As we narrow the focus down on specific cases of historical change construed as sites for empirical investigation and theoretical problems, this antinomy does not hold up. Far from mutually excluding one another, the Theory of Practice and Rational Choice outline analytical agendas that complement one another for the purpose of specifying “with greater theoretical and empirical rigor the complex and dialectical process through which real social systems are transformed by historically situated actors” (Sewell 1987: 171). Why then the confrontation?

Let me suggest two possible answers to this question. The first one traces the permanence of theoretical controversies cast in very broad terms to terminological confusions and conceptual misunderstandings. From this perspective, the controversy denotes a lack of analytical clarification and theoretical elaboration. The proponents of each approach talk past each other because they do not talk about the same thing. While the Theory of Practice investigates practical rationality, the “feel for the game,” i.e., the capacity to come up with the adequate line of conduct without making explicit the reasons for it, Rational Choice is concerned about a mode of action characterized by an explicit awareness of the stakes and a conscious search for the relevant information.

A second possible answer to the question: “Why the confrontation?” points to the competitive logic inherent to the field of academic and intellectual production. The Theory of Practice and Rational Choice purport to elaborate a general theory of action. In this respect, they tread the same turf and have the same pretensions. From this perspective, the main problem lies in the ever temptation to convert hypothetical claims into universalistic ones without further specification and without much attention to either variation (Tilly 1995: 1605) or “explanations invoked as empirically central but not registered in theory” (Adams 1999: 1050). It is naturally more gratifying to be on the side of the universal rather than on that of analytically specific claims. The gratification is symbolic—who beats the universal? It is also institutional if the point is to inflate one’s quotation index.

Bourdieu’s sociology of knowledge has made us aware of the likely outcome of such a configuration. We can reasonably expect the proponents of each approach to try to debunk the general validity of the competitor. Claims for cognitive and theoretical validity get intertwined with classification struggles and legitimacy claims. From this standpoint, knowledge is also a turf war and the entrenched

confrontation of theoretical frameworks constructed as paradigms reflects the incentive structure inherent to a competitive field. No surprise thus that the Theory of Practice and Rational Choice are at loggerheads. They are bound to be as long as they clothe themselves in the mantle of unconditional theories of action.

Acknowledgments I presented a first version of this article at the Yale conference on Bourdieuan theory and historical sociology (April 2005) and at the Politics, Culture and Society Workshop at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (October 2006). I thank both audiences for a stimulating and engaging conversation. I also thank Philip Gorski for inviting me to present this argument at the Yale conference and the Editors and reviewers of *Theory and Society* for their helpful comments. Keedon Kwon gave me expedient and competent help in adapting the format of this article to journal specifications.

References

- Adams, J. (1999). Culture in rational-choice theories of state-formation. In G. Steinmetz (Ed.), *State/culture, state-formation after the cultural turn*. Cornell: Cornell University Press.
- Adams, J. (2005). *The familial state: ruling families and merchant capitalism in early modern Europe*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Adams, J., Clemens, E. S., & Orloff, A. S. (2005). Introduction: Social theory, modernity, and the three waves of historical sociology. In J. Adams, E. S. Clemens, & A. S. Orloff (Eds.), *Remaking modernity: Politics, history, and sociology*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Aronson, E., & Carlsmith, J. (1963). Effect of severity of threat on the valuation of a forbidden behavior. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 66, 584–588.
- Bates, R. H., Greif, A., Levi, M., Rosenthal, J. M., & Weingast, B. (1998). *Analytic narratives*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Beissinger, M. (2002). *Nationalist mobilization and the collapse of the Soviet State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Biernacki, R. (1995). *The fabrication of labor. Germany and Britain, 1640-1914*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bloch, M. (1961). *Feudal society*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Boudon, R. (1989). *The analysis of ideology*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bourdieu. (1962). Célibat et condition paysanne. *Études Rurales*, 5-6, 32-136.
- Bourdieu. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgment of taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Bourdieu. (1988). *Homo academicus*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu. (1989). Reproduction interdite. *Études Rurales*, 113-14, 15-36.
- Bourdieu. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu. (1991). Epilogue: On the possibility of a field of world sociology. Translated from the French by Loïc J.D. Wacquant. In P. Bourdieu and J. S. Coleman (Eds.), *Social theory for a changing society*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Bourdieu. (1996a). *The state nobility: Elite schools in the field of power*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu. (1996b). *The rules of art: Genesis and structure of the literary field*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu. (1998). *Practical reason: On the theory of action*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu. (2000). *Pascalian meditations*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu., & Wacquant, L. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Brundage, J. A. (1987). *Law, sex, and Christian society in medieval Europe*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

- Calhoun, C. (1995). Habitus, field, and capital: Historical specificity in the theory of practice. In C. Calhoun, E. LiPuma, & m Postone (Eds.), *Critical social theory: culture, history, and the challenge of difference*. Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Camic, C. (1986). The matter of habit. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 91(5), 1039–1087.
- Cantor, N. (1993). *The civilization of the middle ages*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Chong, D. (1991). *Collective action and the civil rights movement*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Coleman, J. (1990). *The foundations of social action*. Harvard University Press.
- Davis, L., & North, D. (1970). Institutional change and American economic growth: A first step towards a theory of institutional change. *The Journal of Economic History*, 30(1), 131–149.
- Desbordes, F. (1995). La place de l'autre. Remarques sur quelques emplois de "controversia" dans la rhétorique latine. In A. Le Boulluec (Ed.), *La controverse religieuse et ses formes*. Paris: Cerf.
- Dobry, M. (1985). *Sociologie des crises politiques*. Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques.
- Dobry, M. (2001). "Ereignisse und Situationslogik: Lehren, die man aus der Untersuchung von Situationen politischer Unübersichtlichkeit ziehen kann," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Sonderheft 19: Struktur und Ereignis*: 75-98.
- Duby, G. (1978). *Medieval marriages: Two models from twelfth century France*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Duby, G. (1980). *The three orders. Feudal society imagined*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Duby, G. (1983). *The knight, the lady and the priest: The making of modern marriage in medieval modern France*. New York: Pantheon.
- Durkheim, E. (1983). *Pragmatism and sociology*. Translated by J. C. Whitehouse. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Elias, N. (1994[1939]). *The civilizing process*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Elster, J. (1983). *Sour grapes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Elster, J. (1986). Introduction. In J. Elster (Ed.), *Rational choice*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Elster, J. (2000). Rational choice history: A case of excessive ambition. *American Political Science Review*, 94(3), 685–695.
- Ermakoff, I. (1997). Prelates and princes: Aristocratic marriages, canon law prohibitions and shifts in norms and patterns of domination in the central middle ages. *American Sociological Review*, 62, 405–422.
- Ermakoff, I. (2008). *Ruling oneself out. A theory of collective abdications*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Fabiani, J.-L. (1997). Controverses scientifiques, controverses philosophiques. Figures. Positions, trajets. *Enquêtes*, 5, 11–34.
- Gambetta, D. (1987). *Were they pushed or did they jump? Individual decision mechanisms in education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gilcher-Holtey, I. (1995). "Die Phantasie an die Macht". *Mai 68 in Frankreich*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Gilcher-Holtey, I. (1997). La nuit des barricades, *Sociétés et Représentations*, 120-137.
- Gilcher-Holtey, I. (2001). Kritische Ereignisse und kritischer Moment, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Sonderheft 19: Struktur und Ereignis*: 120-137.
- Goldstone, J. (1994). Is revolution individually rational? *Rationality and Society*, 6, 139–66.
- Goldstone, J. (1998). Initial conditions, general laws, path dependence, and explanation in historical sociology. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 104(3), 829–45.
- Gorski. (1993). The Protestant ethic revisited: Disciplinary revolution and state formation in Holland and Prussia. *American Journal of Sociology*, 99(2), 265-316.
- Gorski. (1995). The Protestant ethic and the spirit of bureaucracy. *American Sociological Review*, 60(5), 783-786.
- Green, D., & Shapiro, I. (1994). *Pathologies of rational choice theory*. New Haven: Yale.
- Heckathorn, D. (1989). Collective action and the second-order free-rider problem. *Rationality and Society*, 1, 78–100.
- Herlihy, D. (1985). *Medieval households*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Joule, R., & Beauvois, J. (2006). *La soumission librement consentie*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Kalyvas, S. (2006). *The logic of violence in civil war*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kiser, E., & Hechter, M. (1998). The debate on historical sociology: Rational choice theory and its critics. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 104(3), 785–816.

- Kiser, E., & Schneider, J. (1995). Rational choice versus cultural explanations of the efficiency of the Prussian tax system. *American Sociological Review*, 60(5), 787–791.
- Knight, F. H. (1923). *Risk, uncertainty, and profit*. Houghton Mifflin: Boston & New York.
- Kuran, T. (1991). Now out of never: The element of surprise in the East European revolution of 1989. *World Politics*, 44, 7–48.
- Kuran, T. (1998). Social mechanisms of dissonance reduction. In P. Hedstrom & R. Swedberg (Eds.), *Social mechanisms: An analytical approach to social theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Laitin, D. (1986). *Hegemony and culture. Politics and religious change among the Yorubas*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Laitin, D. (1992). *Language repertoires and state construction in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Laitin, D. (1998). *Identities in formation. The Russian-speaking populations in the near abroad*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Levi, M. (1988). *Of rule and revenue*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lindenberger, S. (1989). Social production functions, deficits, and social revolutions, prerevolutionary France and Russia. *Rationality and Society*, 1(1), 51–77.
- Lucas, R. (1987). Adaptive behavior and economic theory. In R. Hogarth & M. Reder (Eds.), *Rational choice: The contrast between economics and psychology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- North, D. (1981). *Structure and change in economic history*. New York and London: Norton.
- North, D. (1990). *Institutions, institutional change and economic performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Olson, M. (1965). *The logic of collective action*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- O'Neill, B. (2001). *Honor, symbols, and war*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Petersen, R. D. (2001). *Resistance and rebellion. Lessons from Eastern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Poly, J., & Bournazel, E. (1991). *The feudal transformation, 900-1200*. New York: Holmes and Meier.
- Popkin, S. (1988). Political entrepreneurs and peasant movements in Vietnam. In M. Taylor (Ed.), *Rationality and revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Postone, M., LiPuma, E., & Calhoun, C. (1993). Introduction: Bourdieu and social theory. In C. Calhoun, E. LiPuma, & m Postone (Eds.), *Critical social theory: culture, history, and the challenge of difference*. Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Schelling, T. (1980). *The strategy of conflict*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Schumpeter, J. A. (1942). *Capitalism, socialism and democracy*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Sewell, W. (1980). *Work and revolution in France. The language of labor from the old regime to 1848*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sewell, W. (1985). Ideologies and social revolutions: Reflections on the French case. *Journal of Modern History*, 57, 56–85.
- Sewell, W. (1987). Theory of action, dialectic, and history: Comment on Coleman. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 93(1), 166–172.
- Sewell, W. (1992). A Theory of structure: Duality, agency and transformation. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 98, 1–29.
- Sewell, W. (1996). Events as transformations of structures: Inventing revolution at the Bastille. *Theory and Society*, 25, 841–881.
- Sewell, W. (1999). The concept(s) of culture. In V. Bonnell & L. Hunt (Eds.), *Beyond the cultural turn*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Simon, H. (1978). Rationality as process and as product of thought. *The American Economic Review*, 68 (2), 1–16.
- Sohrabi, N. (2005). Revolutions as pathways to modernity. In J. Adams, E. S. Clemens, & A. S. Orloff (Eds.), *Remaking modernity. Politics, history, and sociology*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Somers, M. (1998). “We’re No angels”: Realism, rational choice, and relationality in social science. *American Journal of Sociology*, 104, 722–784.
- Steinmetz, G. (1999). Introduction: Culture and the state. In G. Steinmetz (Ed.), *State/culture, state-formation after the cultural turn*. Cornell: Cornell University Press.
- Sugden, R. (1986). *The economics of rights, co-operation, and welfare*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Suter, A. (1997a). *Der Schweizerische Bauernkrieg von 1653. Politische Sozialgeschichte - Sozialgeschichte eines politischen Ereignisses*. Tübingen: bibliotheca academica.

- Suter, A. (1997b). Histoire sociale et événements historiques. *Annales HSS*, 3, 543–567.
- Suter, A. (2001). Ereignisse als strukturbrechende und strukturbildende Erfahrungs-, Entscheidungs- und Lernprozesse: Der schweizerische Bauernkrieg von 1653, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Sonderheft 19: Struktur und Ereignis*: 175–207.
- Swidler, A. (1986). Culture in action: Symbols and strategies. *American Sociological Review*, 51, 273–286.
- Tackett, T. (1996). *Becoming a revolutionary. The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the emergence of a revolutionary culture (1789-1790)*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Taylor, M. (1988). Rationality and revolutionary collective action. In M. Taylor (Ed.), *Rationality and revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thomasset, C. (1981). La Représentation de la sexualité et de la génération dans la pensée scientifique médiévale. In W. Hoecke & A. Welkenhuysen (Eds.), *Love and marriage in the twelfth century*. Leuven: Leuven University Press.
- Tilly, C. (1986). *The contentious French*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Tilly, C. (1995). To explain political processes. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 100(6), 1594–1610.
- Trotsky, L. (2001[1932]). *History of the Russian revolution*. New York: Pathfinder.
- Tsebelis, G. (1990). *Nested games: Rational choice in comparative politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Tullock, G. (1971). The paradox of revolution. *Public Choice*, 1, 89–99.
- Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1986). Rational choice and the framing of decisions. *Journal of Business*, 59(4), S251–S278.
- Wacquant, L., & Calhoun, C. (1989). Intérêt, rationalité et culture. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 76(1), 41–60.
- Weber, M. (1978[1922]). *Economy and society*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press.
- Williams, R. (1982). *Marxism and literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Winter, S. (1987). Comments on Arrow and Lucas. In R. Hogarth & M. W. Reder (Eds.), *Rational choice: The contrast between economics and psychology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Zolberg, A. (1972). Moments of madness. *Politics and Society*, 2(2), 183–208.

Ivan Ermakoff is Associate Professor and Associate Chair of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is the author of *Ruling Oneself Out: A Theory of Collective Abdications* (Duke University Press, 2008). He is currently studying the genesis and etiology of state-sponsored persecution.